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TAGS: PHUM PGOV IZ KWM

SUBJECT: WOMEN DEMONSTRATE AGAINST DRAFT CONSTITUTION
PROVISIONS ON EQUALITY AND PERSONAL RIGHTS

1. (U) PolFSN witnessed a sit-in demonstration on July 19 that was organized and sponsored by the Iraqi Women's Net. (NOTE: The Iraqi Women's Net is a network of more than 75 women's non-governmental organizations (NGO). END NOTE.) The sit-in took place in a tent overlooking the Sheraton and Meridian hotels at Firdous Square in Baghdad's city center. The aim of the sit-in demonstration was to protest several articles proposed for inclusion in the draft constitution. (NOTE: There is still no "final text" of a draft constitution, but debate on what should be included continues. END NOTE.)

2. (U) More than 30 NGOs and approximately 150 women from all over Iraq attended the sit-in. Participants included the Iraqi Women's Net, Al Amal, Women for Peace, Iraqi Women's League, Baghdad Women's Association, Faili Kurd Women's Union, Sara Organization, Communist Party, Iraqi Women's Freedom Organization, and the Chaldo-Assyrian Women's Union.

3. (U) The sit-in focused on several aspects of a proposed draft constitution that has been provided to and disseminated by the press and NGOs, as well as Constitution Committee and National Assembly members. The women raised specific issues during this event, including the question of nationality, equal and guaranteed rights for women as mothers, workers, and citizens, the prevention of violence against women, and the quota system.

4. (U) The women demanded that the constitution drafting deadline be extended, rejected the reactivation of Proposition 137 (septel), and lobbied for a quota for female representation of not less than 40 percent in all decision-making positions. They also rejected any time limitations on this quota requirement. Additionally, the group said it wants international human rights standards and agreements as a source for Iraqi legislation.

5. (U) Both local and international media covered the event. Among those present were Al Hurra TV, Sawa Radio, Associated Press, Turkish TV, BBC, CNN, French TV, "New York Times," Reuters, Iraqiya TV, Fayha'a TV, and Sumariya TV. Numerous representatives of women's organizations spoke to the media, including Hana'a Edwar (Al Amal), Shirooq Hussain (Tareeq Al Sha'ab newspaper), Bashaier Khalil (Iraqi Women's League), and Shatha Naji (Women for Peace).

6. (SBU) COMMENT. The women attending the sit-in strike represented the spectrum of Iraq's ethnic and religious diversity. Their message was translated into a series of recommendations that was submitted to the Constitution Committee. However, there are many Islamic women who support a more prominent role for Shari'a in the draft constitution. According to the media, these women held a counter-protest to the Firdous Square event. Throughout the constitution drafting process and in the run-up to the referendum, it is important for women to continue to organize and participate in similar efforts to ensure that they have a voice in the political process. END COMMENT.